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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7757
INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0571
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2381
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 6027
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

UNCLAS KINGSTON 000490

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT PASS EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE FOR INFO

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (DHOFFMANN)
(BALVARADO) (VDEPIRRO) (WSMITH) WHA/EPSC (MROONEY) (FCORNEILLE)
EEB/ESC/IEC/EPC (MCMANUS)
SANTO DOMINGO FOR FCS AND FAS
TREASURY FOR ERIN NEPHEW
INR/RES (RWARNER)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [JM](#) [XL](#)

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: JLP WINS BIG IN NORTH EAST ST. CATHERINE BY
ELECTION, MAINTAINING SLIM MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT

REF: A. KINGSTON 232

[B](#). 08 KINGSTON 398

[C](#). KINGSTON 436

[D](#). KINGSTON 452

[E](#). KINGSTON 405

[F](#). KINGSTON 315

Summary

[1](#). (U) Gregory Mair, the ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Member of Parliament (MP), won handily a court-ordered by-election over the opposition People's National Party's (PNP) candidate, Granville Valentine on June 15. Mair almost tripled his margin of victory in the 2007 general election and preserved the governing JLP's slim parliamentary majority. Jamaica's Court of Appeals had declared the seat vacant last month because Mair had held dual Jamaican-Venezuelan citizenship at the time of his 2007 nomination. Mair subsequently renounced Venezuelan citizenship and was renominated on May 29. The by-election appears to have been orderly and well-run, with the JLP apparently better organized and funded than the PNP. At least two more pending dual citizenship cases are likely to result in by-elections in coming months; the PNP would now have to win both to break the JLP's hold on power. End Summary.

Background

[2](#). (U) Mair's reelection comes on the heels of JLP MP Daryl Vaz's by-election victory in West Portland in March, 2009 (Reftel A), a result of the first of four cases challenging the eligibility of sitting JLP MPs on dual citizenship grounds. The electoral challenges had been filed against their opponents by four PNP candidates defeated in the September, 2007 general election, alleging that the Jamaican Constitution prohibited dual nationals from being nominated for public office. Mair won the by-election by a margin of more than 2,600, garnering 6,329 votes to the PNP's 3,672 and maintaining the JLP's narrow 32-28 seat hold on Parliament. Valentine's defeat also raises more doubts as to PNP President and former Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller's (PSM) leadership of her party. At least two, and perhaps as many as eight, similar challenges might lead to by-elections in the months ahead.

[3](#). (U) The results in North East St. Catherine were not surprising.

Since the establishment of full adult suffrage in 1944, the PNP has only won the constituency five times in sixteen national elections, and then only by narrow margins. Although Mair has only held the seat since September, 2007, he has by all accounts been quite active in the constituency; in fact, the JLP's lavishing of public works projects on the area drew a formal protest from the PNP the day before the election. Media accounts as well as PNP and JLP contacts affirmed that the JLP enjoyed considerable advantages in the by-election in terms of incumbency, funding, and organization. Although polling showed that Phyllis Mitchell, the PNP candidate Mair had defeated in 2007 and who filed the electoral challenge that forced the by-election, would have been much more competitive, she declined to run and the PNP thus turned to the lesser-known Valentine instead.

Low Voter Turnout, Violence Free

¶4. (U) Partnering with representatives from the Canadian and British High Commissions, Poloff visited several polling locations in the constituency as a guest of the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ). Unlike the charged atmosphere in March's West Portland by-election, there was little evidence of tension or unrest in bucolic North East St. Catherine, the most rural of Jamaica's 60 constituencies. Depressed by apathy and an early afternoon rainstorm, turnout was lower than anticipated, with just over fifty percent of eligible voters casting ballots. Lines at polling places were short and orderly, with green JLP t-shirts outnumbering orange-clad PNP supporters in most locations. Security personnel from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) and Jamaica Defence Force (JCF) were present to dissuade violence, and no incidents were reported. Likewise, election observers from Jamaica's Citizens for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE) reported no significant evidence of

electoral law violations, and only minor glitches occurred with the ECJ's fingerprint identification system.

Dissent Within The PNP Ranks

¶5. (SBU) In both by-elections thus far, the JLP incumbents were able to not only hold onto their seats, but to increase their margins of victory considerably over those of 2007. Meanwhile, the PNP strategy (Comment: if indeed it can be called such - there has been speculation that PSM was not fully briefed in 2007 on the potential political repercussions of the dual nationality challenges. (Reftel B) End Comment) of challenging the 2007 results on constitutional grounds appears to have backfired. Amidst public grumbling over the costs of the by-elections during a period of economic austerity, the PNP have had difficulty raising campaign funds, demonstrated poor organization, and fielded weak candidates.

¶6. (U) PSM's low visibility during the campaign - she only appeared in the constituency for campaign events seven times, compared to PM Golding's 12 - suggests that she might be attempting to distance herself from the party's poor showings. Indeed, evidence of PNP dissatisfaction with the party's leadership may be growing. The day after the election, PNP General Secretary (and a potential Simpson Miller successor) Peter Bunting posted on his Facebook profile page the quote: "Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results. Albert Einstein." Several other PNP members responded online by indicating that they "liked" the comment, which likely referred to the by-election results, including PNP Deputy General Secretary Julian Robinson. Later, however, the posting and associated comments were removed from Bunting's online profile page. Nevertheless, PNP sources suggest dissatisfaction with Bunting as well, likened to a "Blackberry General Secretary" who doesn't spend sufficient time on the hustings.

Future By-Elections

¶7. (U) However, the PNP might have reason for optimism should the remaining dual nationality challenges result in by-elections, as appears likely (Reftel C). On July 27, the Court of Appeals is scheduled to hear the electoral challenge to the candidacy of JLP MP Michael Stern, a dual U.S./Jamaican national, in the North West Clarendon constituency. While North West Clarendon has historically

voted JLP, the margins often have been close. Although Stern is reputed to be a better political organizer than Mair and Vaz, he will likely again face businessman Richard Azan, the well-funded former PNP incumbent Stern defeated in 2007 and who subsequently filed the challenge. With Azan's name recognition and history in the district, the JLP might have a more difficult time retaining this marginal seat, especially given speculation that the PNP had been holding back on spending in North East St. Catherine in preparation for a North West Clarendon by-election. Although sources suggest both parties have already sent advance teams into the constituency in preparation for the next by-election, PNP contacts report that "they are taking bets among themselves" that the JLP will prevail yet again.

¶8. (U) The PNP might face a more difficult scenario in the North East St. Ann constituency when the election challenge to JLP MP Shahine Robinson's nomination and her dual U.S./Jamaican citizenship is heard. Although the JLP didn't win the PNP bastion for the first time until 1980, Robinson took the seat for the JLP in a 2001 by-election, then doubled her margin of victory in the 2002 general election. Robinson increased her margin of victory yet again in the 2007 general election, suggesting that it will be very difficult for the PNP to pry the seat away from the very visible, prominent junior cabinet minister.

Golding's Challenges

¶9. (U) In addition, PM Golding has threatened to challenge as many as six sitting PNP MPs on dual citizenship grounds (Reftel 452). Speculation has centered on Sharon Hay Webster of the South Central St. Catherine constituency and Ian Hayles of the Hanover Western constituency, both of whom are believed to have dual U.S./Jamaican citizenship. Other PNP MPs rumored to be in the PM's sights include

Dr. Fenton Ferguson of East St. Thomas, George Anthony Hylton of West St. Andrew, Lisa Hanna of South East St. Ann, and Peter Bunting himself of Central Manchester, often considered a likely successor or challenger to PSM as party leader.

¶10. (U) Were these PNP candidacies to be successfully challenged, the JLP might conceivably pick off a couple of PNP seats and strengthen its parliamentary majority. While South Central St. Catherine, West St. Andrew, South East St. Ann, and Central Manchester are all PNP bastions and unlikely to fall to the JLP, the more marginal Hanover Western and East St. Thomas constituencies might be ripe for the picking. Although Golding has been critical of the PNP's strategy of using the courts to achieve what they couldn't at the ballot box (Reftel D), he might prefer to go that route himself rather than face the uncertainties of a snap national election.

Conclusion

¶11. (U) The PNP's defeat in North East St. Catherine reflects poorly on Simpson Miller's leadership and suggests a party that remains in disarray following its 2007 defeat. Despite the PNP's efforts to make the by-election a national referendum on the JLP's 18 months in power, local issues - jobs and public works projects - appeared to prevail, as is usually the case in such contests. Furthermore, the PNP risks provoking a backlash, both within the party as well as society at large, should the seemingly endless string of expensive by-elections begin to be perceived as wasteful and extravagant during a period of economic crisis, financial austerity, and the prospect of government budget cuts and tax increases. (Reftel E, F) PNP contacts report a general sense that the party is in a worse state than the JLP during its political nadir in the 1990s.

¶12. (U) The JLP's parliamentary majority, on the other hand, appears to be secure for the time being. With two more by-elections likely, the JLP need win only one to retain its governing majority. Should it do so, a snap election would be unnecessary and the JLP would have no reason to file challenges against any PNP MPs with dual nationality issues, although the Golding administration might still choose to do so in order to bolster its parliamentary majority. Whether the JLP would then use this political stability, however tenuous, to address Jamaica's myriad economic and social concerns

would remain to be seen. End Comment.

Moss